

REVELATION AND SCIENCE.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

St. George's Church, Lennoxville, Canada East.

JULY 1, 1864,

AT THE ANNUAL CONVOCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
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The MS of this sermon was given me, at my request, by the author; and as I conceive it to contain a valuable *précis* of the duties and obligations of students and scholars in an institution such as ours, I have had it printed for circulation among the students of the University, and pupils of the Junior department, earnestly praying their attention to its contents, and that with the blessing of God it may aid their progress in becoming good Christians, gentlemen, and scholars.

J. S. McCORD,
CHANCELLOR.

BISHOP'S COLLEGE, *Jyth*, 1864.

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1 TIM. vi. 20.

"Oppositions of science falsely so called."

THE passage selected for our text is, when rightly understood, a striking example of the wide applicability of Scripture, while it also furnishes us with certain cautions much needed by the student, in view of the intellectual dangers to which he is at the present time most exposed. "O Timothy," says the Apostle, addressing the young and ardent Bishop of Ephesus, "keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so called." The meaning of these words is simple and obvious. They declare that there is a certain body of truth, divinely given, once delivered to the saints, to which we must cling; and they also warn us against that pretence of knowledge which would array one part of God's works against another—God in the Bible against God in Nature.

But these words will strike us with much greater force if we consider the exact errors they were meant to combat, and the place which they

occupy in Holy Scripture. The Epistles to Timothy are the latest written by St. Paul. They date from his second imprisonment at Rome, and did not long precede his death. They mark a great change in the sentiments and trials of the church. The early days of St. Paul's apostleship were one continued struggle with the Judaizing party. He was compelled to defend the perfect sufficiency of Christ's Atonement by every means at his command—by argument, by authority, by illustration, by the Law and by the Prophets. This is the burden of his earlier teaching: Christ alone justifies; Christ alone sanctifies, without the intervention of any other thing, whether of Jewish observance or of mere human effort. Then came a period of comparative peace, when the churches were reduced into order and system. Soon, however, new adversaries arose. The Judaizers had disappeared, but, by a startling revolution, the pendulum swung to the other extreme, and a school arose, which, instead of outward formalism, made their boast of superior illumination. They sat in judgment upon Christianity, accepted or explained away its doctrines as they pleased, and proposed, in its place, a great eclectic system, made up of fragments borrowed from all the religions of the day. Here was the first dawn of

those errors which, under the name of Gnosticism, inflicted such terrible injury on the Church for above one hundred years, and which the later books of Scripture, the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, and those of St. John and St. Jude, seem especially calculated to meet.

We see then in the space of about forty years an almost entire change in the tendencies of religious error. The new heresy was even more dangerous than the old. The former associated certain legal observances with Christ, but the latter reduced him to a mere emanation from God, an æon, a phantom. It denied the literal truth of the Resurrection (2 Tim. ii. 18), and said that it was already past. It discredited the Scriptures, and offered instead a mass of fancies and theories and shreds of other systems, as a substitute for the Word of God, and for that simple but sublime Creed "with which the Church was born."

And have we not here, my Brethren, a lesson the meaning of which was by no means exhausted in the Apostolic age? It is not once only in her history that the Church has had to struggle against superstition on one hand and Rationalism on the other. Has not our own history as a Church during this century some strong points of resemblance? Sixty years ago she was buried in formalism and

a barren outward morality. The Evangelical party first aroused us from our slumbers, as St. Paul opposed the Judaizers. They preached and taught and wrote till the whole Church was awakened. But their teaching was mainly subjective. The work done needed to be fixed and established. Then came the great Oxford movement, to which we are indebted for the revival of the true spirit of Churchmanship, for the great extension of the Episcopate, for the consolidation of the Church on its true principles of Evangelic truth and Apostolic order. This may be paralleled with that second stage of St. Paul's labors, when he revisited the Churches he had founded, and established an uniform ecclesiastical system in the chief scenes of his success. And now, when all seemed to prosper, and a prospect more glorious than any she had yet seen was opening before the Church, a new class of trials and dangers rises to view. As the Gnostics and Gnosticizing Jews arose to trouble the flourishing and united Church of Ephesus; so have we in the midst of our energy and success been startled and crippled by the outbreak of a new and subtle infidelity. Christianity is denied or explained away, the light of Human Reason, the verifying faculty as it is called, is exalted as a judge over all that God has declared

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and revealed; and out of the vast complex of creeds and sects and religions we are led to hope for some Church of the Future, the creation of human wisdom, and of the progressive amelioration of our race—a Church more united and comprehensive and enlightened and glorious than anything which our fallen earth has yet witnessed.

Such is the danger which menaces us, such the tempting prospect set before us, by men whose eloquence and ability and learning should have adorned a better cause! And how is their end to be carried out? By persuading the student that the idea of the peculiar inspiration of Scripture is a calamitous mistake, which cripples the spirit of free enquiry, and leaves nothing for the mind but to accept, without doubt or question, whatever claims Inspiration for itself. And having reduced Scripture to the level of an ordinary record, they next seek to establish a hopeless contradiction between the discoveries of Modern Science and the ancient popular phraseology of the Bible. They exaggerate the divisions and shortcomings of Christians, and exalt whatever traces may be found amongst the Heathen of that Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And thus, by alternately pulling down our faith in the historic truth of Christianity,

and by exalting the efforts of mere Human Reason unaided by Revelation, in its search after religious truth, the ground is gradually cleared for the realization of that gorgeous but cloudy vision which they have held before our eyes.

And what is the safeguard to protect us in these temptations, so powerful with the ardent and enthusiastic student? We must remember that the first, the earliest part of a Christian's duty, is to believe what is delivered, not to investigate what is revealed. We are to keep that great deposit of Faith and Practice committed to our trust. We are to believe it with all our hearts, love it with all our strength, project our very selves into it, and live for it as our chief end. Thus guarded we are safe. No one who has felt the inward strength and peace of the Gospel will seek to quench his thirst at the broken cisterns of man's devices, however fair and beautiful they may appear. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." A student thus armed may safely encounter the difficult problems of Science. He may pursue his path unshrinkingly, with no lurking dread lest in the long run an impassable gulf should be opened between Nature and Revelation. He need not fear, for Truth is mighty and shall prevail, though

all the blasts of error be let loose into the sky. Humility will keep him from dogmatizing on uncertain grounds and undecided issues; Faith will triumph over the perplexities which arise from difficulties yet unsolved; and the blessing of God will rest upon him who has conscientiously devoted his toil and his talents to the elucidation of the works of God, whether of Nature or of Grace.

Would we mark the real analogy between the visible and invisible worlds, between God and Nature, we would bid you take especial heed of the peculiar character of our Saviour's teaching. The sceptical philosopher would set up *antitheses*, oppositions between Science and Religion. But our Lord's delight was to teach by Parables, in which He sets alongside some great spiritual truth its earthly counterpart. His are no casual coincidences, no arbitrary illustrations. They are linked together by a law of secret affinity. We have learned by the prismatic spectra that the same metallic bases exist in the sun and moon as in the earth, and thus conclude that the vast universe is homogeneous, made up of similar materials, and obeying the same fundamental laws. Not less certain is the harmony between the natural and spiritual worlds. The earthly Tabernacle was made after the Pattern of things in the heavens

(Heb. ix. 23); and in that glorious Psalm of Nature, the 104th, the Psalmist describes the beauty of the material world under images borrowed from the Sanctuary. He that is really a seeker after truth will readily perceive and acknowledge these mysterious harmonies; and, as Archbishop Trench somewhere observes, the question suggested by the Angel in Milton will often be forced upon his meditations :

"What if Earth
Be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein
Each to other like, more than on earth is thought."

How little, again, does the great Apostle of the Gentiles shrink from the appeal to Natural Religion. He blames those who shut their eyes to its teaching, and refuse to learn the invisible things of God from the things that are seen. He instances the grain buried and dying in the earth, yet upspringing in new life, as an example of our Resurrection. He sends us to the Vineyard and to the Field, to the mystical relation of man and wife, to the union of the members in the body, to learn therefrom truths of the deepest concernment. He at least was cognizant of no contradiction between the Worlds of Sight and Spirit. Heaven and Earth were to him as parts of one grand harmonious whole, in which the one God of Order and of Love was carrying out His

great designs, now according to a higher law, and now according to a lower. It is no derogation to the Supreme Being to suppose that He should sometimes supersede the lower by the higher law. Even man himself, God's vicegerent upon earth, has this power in a limited degree. The stone which would fall to the earth by the power of gravity, can be supported or hurled upwards by the free will of man. And so surely can the Almighty Author both of Nature and of Grace, reveal to us what He pleases and as He pleases, and support that Revelation by Miracles and by Prophecy, without any real opposition or contradiction to those general principles on which His natural government of the world is at other times carried on.

Permit me now to apply what has been said to the studies of this place, and to the tone and temper in which they should be pursued.

It has been the constant desire of the Church of England, that the clergy and laity should be educated together, until they enter upon the studies appropriate to their respective lines in life. Up to that point indeed, their studies and aims ought to be the same. The object of all education worthy of the name is to teach men to think logically and correctly, and to clothe their thoughts

in suitable language. Hence comes the need of classical and mathematical studies, the two mightiest auxiliaries to Right Thinking and Right Speaking. Hence the value of a thorough acquaintance with history and the writers of the past, that the mind may be stored with ideas, and may reap the fruits of human experience. A man thus trained and matured is equal to the requirements and difficulties of any profession, whether in secular life or in the arduous and responsible position of a minister of the Church of God.

Nor is it only general principles that the clerical and lay students have in common. The rudiments of Theological knowledge should be taught equally to both. Every educated layman ought to be familiar with his Bible, to know the reasons of his faith, the doctrines, discipline and history of the Church, and I might also add, be able to read the Greek Testament for himself. The clergyman's studies are only a further advance in the same direction, with especial reference to his ecclesiastical vocation.

It is a matter of very evil augury when any great divergence of sentiment and opinion exists or is thought to exist between the Clergy and Laity. And that in the great cities at least, such divergence does often exist is undeniable. Now, it is to

this Institution that the country has a right to look for a healing of the breach—for a spirit of reconciliation between Religion and Science, as well as of charity which should make all work together for the common good.

For first, the Church has certainly a right to expect that such of her children as have passed through this College, shall bear a definite stamp, liberal indeed and large minded towards others, but warmly and intelligently attached to their own Communion; in the words of good old Jeremy Taylor "contending earnestly for the faith, but not to the breach of charity, or the denying each other's hope."

Again, the Church also looks to this place for instruction and guidance in the impending conflict between Faith and Scepticism—if not for the actual solution of difficulties, at all events for the spirit in which they are to be met. Here alone in this portion of the world can freedom of thought in scientific matters be combined with a reverent regard for Antiquity, a firm belief in a definite body of revealed objective truth, a careful retention of the Nicene Creed, and of all that is essential in the Nicene discipline. These are surely the conditions under which, if ever, Christendom can be visibly reunited, and the respective

claims of religion and science fully reconciled. For each of these glorious ends the Church of England has peculiar advantages. In her religious aspect she is, like the last day of the Athenian month, at once old and new. In her ministerial succession, in her creeds and her liturgy, she stands on common ground with the other great branches of the Catholic Church in the East and West. In her reformation, she has also certain sympathies and affinities for the Protestant bodies which shook off the yoke of Rome at the same time as herself, and is thus a medium between both Catholic and Protestant, being herself both Catholic and Protestant. And in her literary and scientific aspect, she has ever been the patron of sincere and sober investigation and of sound learning, though never of the uncertainties of mere theory and conjecture. Bacon and Newton among her laymen, Barrow and Buckland and Scoresby among her priests, are but representatives of a vast host who have from age to age sought to unveil the works of God in the material universe. And when the time comes for those great discoveries, upon the brink of which, say some of the scientific journals, we now seem to be hovering, which shall reveal "the very springs of the machine" of the world, and combine and harmonize the hints and

conjectures and fragments of knowledge on which we are now working and theorizing, surely those discoveries will be due to the laborious, conscientious toil of men who have been nurtured in institutions like the present, where Learning, untrammelled by vexatious fetters, shall be proud to lay her brightest laurels at the foot of the Cross.

And now, in conclusion, let me say a few words to you, my young friends, some of you once my pupils, who are here preparing for the work of the ministry. The time here spent is, to you even more than to others, the most important period of your lives. "The child is father to the man." It may seem to you of trifling importance whether you spend this day or that, more or less, in careless idleness, or, worse still, in self-indulgence and dissipation. Every day is shaping your character and fixing your bias; and as the tree is, so will be its fruits. I know that with many of you the desire of learning needs rather to be repressed than stimulated—that you need a regular system of relaxation and exercise, in order that the mind may digest and assimilate its food. If the body break down and become unfitted for the work of life, the mental training will be thrown away. "*Mens sana in corpore sano*"

should be the great object of every student. But there are always some who think but lightly of the responsibilities before them, who have no love for their work, no conscientious desire to master it, no wish to excel. And there may be others who love knowledge merely for its own sake, and not as fitting them for increased usefulness. Let me then remind you that your choice of the ecclesiastical life is entirely your own, and that you can yet withdraw from it, if you so please; but that if you proceed you will be called upon, ere you are admitted to the lowest order in the ministry, to answer that most solemn question, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministration, to serve God for the promoting of His glory and the edifying of His people?" How can you answer that question, if you have never seriously thought upon or felt what it was you were about to undertake till a few weeks or days before the examination? The life of a clergyman in this country has little of the sunshine of worldly prosperity. There are few positions in which you can hope to make a figure in the world. If you would retain your own self-respect, if you would enjoy any happiness and satisfaction in the life you have chosen; above all, if you

would bring forth for God any fruit that may remain, and be yourselves owned by Him at the Great Day, you must realize the work that lies before you as the noblest in which man can be engaged. You must seek to acquire such habits of thinking and acting, as will make you good soldiers of Jesus Christ. You must aim at influencing not merely by pulpit teaching, but by the energy and weight of your character. You must not bring yourselves to think that mere outward routine, however conscientious, is sufficient. The work of the ministry, to be done effectively, must be done with a certain force; nor, surely, is that "ardent, rejoicing might of labour," which ensures success in any other profession, less necessary or less likely to achieve its end in this.

For ten long years I have been more or less intimately connected with this University. During that time new buildings have been erected again and again—the Chapel, the School, the Dining Hall, the Rector's house. A new department has been added—new professorships founded, generation after generation of its students have come and gone. Many of its alumni are now in Canada and elsewhere fully engaged in the work of life, and Alma Mater has every reason to thank God for her children. Let us not however shut

our eyes to the work yet to be done. Our numbers, as a University, are far below what they ought to be, after making allowance for every drawback; there is much needed for our full equipment, and there is also wanting, permit me to say, amongst the graduates a stronger feeling of interest in the welfare of one another and of the University, without which its future progress and usefulness will be materially checked.

It only remains for me to express, on this last occasion when in all human probability I shall have the privilege of addressing you, my sincere and fervent wishes for the prosperity of this College in both its departments. Within its walls may Science and Religion ever walk hand in hand! May its alumni ever be found in the foremost ranks, in the halls of the Legislature, in the marts of commerce, wherever trained skill and energy and public spirit and high morality are required! And, more especially, may there proceed from this place a constant succession of earnest, enlightened and devoted ministers, who may not only build up the Church of this country in unity and strength, but may also extend and perpetuate its blessings wherever, throughout the wide regions of the North and West, Commerce or Agriculture, or Science, or Arts, or Arms may assemble the sons of men!

MAR. 12/31